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A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

The Theory and Practice of American Political Intelligence

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The twentieth century has been marked by a succession of different forms of restraint on political expression: criminal anarchy statutes, sedition laws, deportations, Congressional anti-subversive probes, loyalty oaths, enforced registration. These and related measures still survive. But in recent years new, more formidable ways of responding to political and social movements on the left have emerged. The most important of these is the system of political intelligence, which is rapidly coalescing into a national network.[1]

Despite the efforts of intelligence officials to keep intelligence operations secret, reliable information about our intelligence system is steadily accumulating. We now have a clearer picture of the methods and targets of political surveillance. As a result, we can no longer seriously doubt that the main purpose of such activity is political control of dissent or that the frequently advanced justifications of law enforcement or national security are often no more than a "cover."

On March 21, 1971, a group calling itself the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI mailed or delivered to a congressman and senator as well as to the Washington *Post*, *The New York Times*, and the Los Angeles *Times* a packet containing fourteen documents, selected from over 1,000 stolen from a small FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. The fourteen documents, all of them of recent date and undisputed authenticity, show that the FBI concentrates much of its investigative effort on college dissenters and black student groups. According to a memorandum from J. Edgar Hoover such groups "pose a definite threat to the Nation's [illegible]." conclusion that he has not been able to support and that both the Washington

challenged.

When conducting surveillance of a Swarthmore College philosophy professor regarded as a "radical," the FBI enlisted the assistance of the local police and postmaster, as well as a campus security officer and switchboard operator. In one of the documents, the FBI agent in charge of the Philadelphia bureau instructs his agents at Media that more interviews are

> . . . in order . . . for plenty of reasons, chief of which are it will enhance the paranoia endemic in these circles and will further serve to get the point across that there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox. In addition, some will be overcome by the overwhelming personalities of the contacting agent and will volunteer to tell all—perhaps on a continuing basis.

Dramatic disclosures of this sort as well as the recent Senate hearings on Army intelligence will undoubtedly help to cure the surviving skepticism about these practices. Until fairly recently even the targets of surveillance were reluctant to credit the existence of police activities which violate the most deeply held premises of their society. But political surveillance has become so obtrusive and its targets so numerous that it can no longer be easily ignored or justified. A sharper awareness of intelligence has, in turn, opened up new sources of data about a field which I have been researching since the McCarthy era.[2]

Of course dossiers, informers, and infiltrators are hardly new. But since the early Sixties, when attorneys general in the South formed a rudimentary intelligence network in order to curb the integrationist activities of students, political surveillance and associated practices have spread throughout the nation.

Surveillance has expanded largely because of the scale and militance of the protest movements that erupted in the Sixties. Policy makers and officers of intelligence agencies were then faced with the need to identify and control new actors on a new political stage—no easy matter in view of the anarchic radical milieu, characterized by highly mobile and anonymous young people, who tend to be hostile to formal organization and leadership. The social remoteness of new radicals concentrated in "tribal," self-contained groups made it all the more difficult to identify them.

Most of the existing intelligence agencies at that time were no more effective than other institutions in our society. Their techniques were as outmoded as their notions of subversion dominated by an old Left composed of "Communists," "fellow travelers," and "fronts." Intelligence files were choked with millions of dossiers of aging or dead radicals. At the same time, new gadgetry—miniaturization, audio-electronics, infrared lens cameras, computers, and data banks—gave intelligence possibilities undreamed of by the most zealous practitioners of the repressive arts of the nineteenth century.

According to the herald of the "technetronic" society, Zbigniew Brzezinski, new developments in technology will make it "possible to assert almost continuous surveillance over every citizen and maintain up-to-date files, containing even personal information about the . . . behavior of the citizen, in addition to the more customary data." Full access to critical data, he adds, will give the undercover agent and the roving political spy greater flexibility in planning and executing countermeasures.[3]

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